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AF/S FOR B. NEULING
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [ZI](#) [VIP](#)
SUBJECT: HOUSE STAFF DELEGATION VISITS ZIMBABWE

REF: A) HARARE 468 B) HARARE 469

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher W. Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

Summary

[¶1.](#) (SBU) Majority Staffer Malik Chaka and Minority Staffer Pearl-Alice Marsh from the House of Representatives International Relations Committee (HIRC) visited Zimbabwe March 20-25, traveling to Bulawayo March 21-22. In Bulawayo the Staff Delegation met renegade independent candidate Jonathan Moyo (Ref A) as well as with MDC M.P. David Coltart and the town's MDC mayor. In Harare, they met with MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai (Ref B), two of the three Mutare Bishops, as well as Anti-Corruption/Monopolies Minister Didimyus Mutasa, Reserve Bank (RBZ) Governor Gideon Gono, and Media and Information Commission Chairman Tafataona Mahoso. In addition, the delegation met with a variety of leaders of civil society groups. The StaffDel's meeting with MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai is reported in ref B.

[¶2.](#) (C) Both government and opposition politicians were upbeat about their parties, electoral prospects. With some exceptions, MDC officials acknowledged that the recent election climate had been more peaceful than in 2002, but they, the Bishops, and the civil society leaders urged the U.S. to continue to press Zimbabwe's neighbors to call the election fairly. Neither media regulator Mahoso nor RBZ Governor Gono offered much promise of loosening the GOZ's grip on the press and the economy. Mutasa acknowledged that the GOZ would request international food aid shortly after elections, which he blamed on drought, while the local head of WFP attributed the food crisis to government mismanagement. End Summary.

MDC Believes Tide Turning Their Way

[¶3.](#) (C) Bulawayo's MDC executive mayor Japhet Ndagbeni-Ncube said Bulawayo was peaceful and likely to remain so. He reported that police were not hostile to the MDC and in fact were working with the MDC, in many instances offering invaluable tips. Nonetheless, the ruling party continued to abuse its control of government resources. He predicted that the MDC would take at least 80 seats nationally, "70 if we fail completely." He urged the USG to pursue quiet diplomacy and not play into Mugabe's hands by taking the lead in condemning him. Mbeki and other African leaders would be more effective in that regard.

[¶4.](#) (C) At dinner March 21, David Coltart and Thokozani Khupe, MDC MP candidates in Bulawayo constituencies, said the environment was generally peaceful. However, some people had been beaten or threatened, and food continued to be a source of ruling party leverage. Still, the MDC's surprisingly wide exposure and a more constructive police posture (three village headmen were arrested in Lupane, for example, for tearing down MDC posters) were opening the door. Indeed, Coltart, who just two months ago told the Ambassador that the MDC would be lucky to take 25 seats, forecast it would win at least half the contested seats (i.e. 60) even accounting for ruling party skullduggery. He urged the USG to "be bolder" with South Africa and Botswana and to back tough rhetoric with action.

ZANU-PF Official Believes Party Still Resonates with Voters

[¶5.](#) (C) Minister for Anti-Corruption/Monopolies and ZANU-PF Secretary for Administration Didymus said Zimbabwe was

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"grateful" for sanctions because they had pushed the country to redouble its economic efforts. The ruling party wanted better relations with the United States and the West and felt that its isolation was unwarranted. However, he indicated that Zimbabwe was unlikely to take the first overt step

toward rapprochement since "it wasn't the one who closed the door." He asserted that the election atmosphere was "less violent than before", would be violence-free on election day, and would be "freer and fairer than all past elections."

¶16. (C) Mutasa said that renewed drought meant that the GOZ would require international food assistance again in spite of earlier official GOZ assurances to the contrary. He said he had advised British officials of the situation that morning but did not indicate when a formal appeal would be forthcoming. (Note: Local WFP representatives are betting on early April, after the elections.) Mutasa apologized for Tsholotsho's District Administrator's ejection of the

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StaffDel following their March 22 meeting with Moyo (Ref A).

Media Czar and Central Banker Backpedal on Press/Economic Liberalization

¶17. (C) Media and Information Commission (MIC) Chairman Tafataona Mahoso briefed the StaffDel on current media legislation. Mahoso said the GOZ's goal was developing community papers that served the country's interests, rather than "commercial papers" funded by foreign capital. In that regard, Mahoso claimed the GOZ had closed the opposition Daily News and Weekly Times due to these papers, failure to adhere to licensing and registration procedures designed to protect the "national content" in Zimbabwe's press.

¶18. (C) Reserve Bank (RBZ) Governor Gideon Gono told the StaffDel that "2004 marked a turnaround of the economy," explaining that year-to-year inflation has fallen from 624 to 127 percent, which he acknowledged was still among the highest in the world. As to the recent slide of the zimdollar on parallel markets, Gono acknowledged that the RBZ had stopped chasing down parallel traders during the election campaign and argued that he was unable to defend the zimdollar's value due to pre-election expenses. Gono refused to be drawn out on the GOZ's post-election economic plans, such as a rumored devaluation.

¶19. (C) Gono said the GOZ's goal was "command agriculture," suggesting the GOZ would intervene further in this beleaguered sector. The RBZ Governor said he wanted the GOZ to issue tradable 99-year leases to land reform beneficiaries, enabling them to transfer and borrow against their assigned properties. Yet when pressed, Gono backtracked from this market-oriented approach and told the StaffDel that the GOZ was not prepared to fully relinquish control of the properties and would forcibly remove any of the 140,000 land reform beneficiaries who were not farming "seriously."

Bishops Also Predict Good Result

¶10. (C) Mutare Bishops Trevor Manhanga (Evangelical) and Patrick Mutume (Catholic) told the Staffdel that it was too early to predict the outcome of the elections but said the MDC would probably at least maintain the same number of seats. The elections could not be considered free and fair because the playing field was tilted in favor of ZANU-PF by factors such as restrictive legislation such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), rumors spread by ZANU-PF supporters that votes would not be secret, the errors in the voters' roll, the disenfranchisement of the Diaspora, and the likelihood that ZANU-PF supporters would attempt to stack the queues early in the day and prevent MDC supporters from voting. It was also not clear what role the reduction in violence would play in voters' willingness to vote their conscience, after so many of years of violence and intimidation

¶11. (C) The Bishops added that ZANU-PF Secretary for Information and Publicity Nathan Shamuyarira had approached them about brokering negotiations with the MDC after the election. Shamuyarira had also told them ZANU-PF wanted their help in restoring the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of the international community. In that regard, Manhanga said the international community should recognize the steps the GOZ had taken and use that as a basis to further engage with the GOZ. However, he said these changes did not represent "the whole loaf" and that the international community should continue to press for reforms. The Bishops added that it was important to understand Mugabe's psychology; Mugabe wanted to leave the presidency but needed a 2/3's majority in Parliament to do so on his own terms. Without such a majority he would be forced to negotiate with the opposition.

Civil Society Leader Cite Uneven Playing Field

112. (C) National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) Chairman Lovemore Madhuku noted that while physical violence was down, numerous other factors nonetheless created an uneven election field. He cited unequal media access, the lack of independent government institutions, and repressive legislation as examples. Madhuku acknowledged strong MDC support but said he believed that institutionalized unfairness would prevent the MDC from winning more than 50 seats. He advocated focusing less on election results and more on mass action from opponents of the GOZ to press for reforms such as revising the constitution and repealing repressive legislation.

USAID & Partners8 Concerned by Potential for Fraud

113. (C) USAID hosted a lunch for the Staffdel with eight "core partners" from civil society (N.B. The NCA is not a core partner.) The participants said the ruling party would try to influence the outcome of the elections via fraud and intimidation. They agreed with the Ambassador that the elections needed to be judged against SADC guidelines rather than past elections. In that regard, Brian Kagoro from the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition noted that the South African national observer team in 2002 had made recommendations that had not fulfilled and that could be also be used to assess the election. Some participants expressed concern over the role of SADC observers, who may already have prejudged the elections as free and fair, but one participant noted that the representatives from Mauritius had told him they would not go along with a whitewash.

Pollster Predicts Good MDC Showing

114. (SBU) Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI) Researcher Charles Mangongera said results from the organization's December 2004/January 2005 survey suggested a healthy election environment: 86% of voters said they plan to vote and 75% said they trusted the voter rolls. At the same time, 72% knew nothing about the government's electoral changes and only 16% knew about the SADC guidelines, indicating that the electorate was largely unaware of the criteria that will be used to judge whether the election is free and fair. Overall, Mangongera said he believed the MDC would keep its current seats, especially in urban areas, and would surprise ZANU-PF by gaining some in rural areas. While he said he expected violence to remain low after elections, he emphasized that the political freedom would remain limited.

Food Security and HIV/AIDS

115. (SBU) Beyond election-related meetings, the StaffDel also attended a food security briefing from local representatives of the UN's Food for Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Food Program (WFP) as well as NGOs C-Safe and FEWSNET and a roundtable discussion of the HIV/AIDS situation. On food security, the Staffdel's briefers painted a grim picture of the coming maize harvest, arguing that the GOZ could require up to 1,000,000 tons of grain imports or donations to feed the population. WFP Director Kevin Farrell said "ever-present centralization" in the buying and selling of maize by the GOZ's parastatal Grain Marketing Board (GMB) "is really the problem," rather than recent droughts. Representatives from a variety of USG-funded HIV/AIDS and health organizations told the StaffDel that they needed and could use more human resources. Unlike most other African countries, they said Zimbabwe had the capacity and infrastructure to absorb funding, but would lose this advantage without forthcoming support.

Comment

116. (C) We have commented elsewhere on the upcoming election, including our scene-setter, Harare 467. That said, we were struck by the Staffdel's enthusiastic reception. In spite of busy pre-election campaigning, both government and opposition leaders were enthusiastic about interacting with staffers Chaka and Marsh. Nearly every interlocutor we sought out readily consented to a meeting and many other local figures called to ask for a spot on the agenda. The delegation also generated considerable media interest. Post believes this delegation demonstrated a high demand for future Congressional delegations, which we would welcome.

117. (U) The StaffDel did not have the opportunity to clear this message.
Dell